

**Oral History Interview with
Heber Clewett**

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Heber Clewett Summary

Heber Clewett taught at the Voorhis School for Boys in San Dimas, California. The school was founded by Nash Motor Company executive Charles Voorhis in 1929 and provided an education and room and board for boys from troubled or poor households. Voorhis' son, Jerry Voorhis served as headmaster of the school until 1936, when he was elected to the United States House of Representatives. Two years later, the elder Voorhis decided to close the school and donate the campus to the state of California. The site was used as the southern satellite campus of the California State Polytechnic School in San Luis Obispo. The Voorhis Campus, as it was known, would eventually develop into California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

Subject Headings

Voorhis, Jerry
Voorhis School for Boys

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Heber Clewett

January 18, 1960

Interview Conducted by Robert S. Beall

Transcribed by Andy Kung

RB: Could you give your name please?

HC: Heber Clewett

RB: When did you teach the Voorhis School for Boys?

HC: From when the time it was organized until the school was changed was [inaudible]

RB: And what subject did you teach out there?

HC: I taught Science and Agriculture.

RB: How did you go about getting to Mr. [Charles] Voorhis when he opened his school? Did he send out letters or per application?

HC: No, he came to see me through some mutual friends.

RB: And you just went out to the Voorhis Campus when he opened it up then?

HC: Well, I went back to Pomona College for a year of graduate work in the meantime.

RB: Why did he come up to San Dimas to set up the school? Did he ever mention it?

HC: Well he investigated all localities all over in the various states and was attracted to this particular location.

RB: Did he ever mention how much he paid Mr. Johnson for the land?

HC: Yes, but I wouldn't dare to say that.

RB: Ok. [laughs] How many boys were at the school?

HC: At one time?

RB: Mhm.

HC: Oh, I've forgotten. About [pause] around 75, 80.

RB: And what was their average achievement? I mean was it an above average group, do you think, from your teaching experience?

HC: I think it was average, or a little above average.

RB: Where did you live on the campus?

HC: My home was the second building finished there. I lived on the south side, south of the swimming pool.

RB: What type of buildings were they?

HC: Spanish type.

RB: Spanish type.

HC: Tile roof.

RB: Did you have two bedrooms in your home?

HC: Yes.

RB: Did you eat dinner over at the hall?

HC: No, no. We had our own family.

RB: And what was the average salaries out there at the school? For teachers at that time.

HC: Well that's another thing I wouldn't want to discuss.

RB: Ok. Mr. Voorhis told me about how much the school meant to you.

HC: Well, [inaudible] not you know.

RB: How much, [inaudible] come to Voorhis? Do you happen to know before he came out here?

HC: Jerry Voorhis, was headmaster of [a] school in Wyoming.

RB: Was that [inaudible] farm? And in turn he came out here? Now did he start his master's at Claremont before he decided to?

HC: We were there at the same time.

RB: There at the same time, when they started building the buildings out there and what were some of the interesting events you look back over? Some of the boys—you know just everyday occurrences there.

HC: Well, I think some of our camping trips and some of our athletic events were perhaps the most interesting. They, some of the faculty members, were very interested in dramatics and we had plays that interested the boys a lot. Swimming was always a very lively interest.

RB: Do you remember—I've heard, we've heard different rumors around the campus there—but an Olympic team training there in 1932? Do you remember anything there?

HC: I didn't know anything about that.

RB: I just wanted—because you know how rumors get started.

HC: No, in 1932, no there was none. We had, I remember a different time people would come up and demonstrate something other. Olympic high jump, I remember came one time. Went through a few jumps. But I don't know any Olympic training.

RB: What other type of people did they have out there? [Inaudible] Cultural or just entertainment for the boys?

HC: You mean from outside?

RB: Yes, outside source.

HC: Oh, various people and some quite well known came different times.

RB: Do you remember any of the names off hand?

HC: For instance, Dr. Wolf from Harvard I believe. Emeritus lectured to us and we had a series of lectures by a man name Hurlbutt.

RB: What were those on?

HC: Those were on Early History of California. Especially local history. Oh, we had all kinds of things that time. Very often people would come in and either talk to us or put on some kind of little show for us in the meantime.

RB: Did the boys' parents pay for part of the way or did Mr. Voorhis pay for them?

HC: Very few of them did. Some, or they could. Many had no parents.

RB: Some of the boys—do you see any of these boys anymore?

HC: Quite often, we have reunions every year.

RB: Oh, you do? Where do you be holding them?

HC: Well of late, we have been holding them over at Pasadena. We used to hold them there at Voorhis School sometimes and various places. Parks.

RB: Why did Mr. Voorhis close the school? There must be a reason, I mean.

HC: Well, Jerry Voorhis became interested in political activity and he was not available as headmaster and Mr. Voorhis didn't feel he could carry it on by himself.

RB: Who took over as headmaster after Jerry left?

HC: They had several different people there.

RB: Do you remember Dr. Balcom?

HC: Yes.

RB: What was his association with the school?

HC: Dr. Balcom was a well-acquainted with the family, and he was there in the very first days of the school. He was, had charge of all religious activity there and lived right there on the campus.

RB: Do you know the story on that little backyard? I mean little graveyard behind the chapel?

HC: Yes, to a degree. They, some of the people there, felt that when they passed on they would like to be buried there. This was licensed and doing all the legal requirements we were conformed with and there were a few graves there.

RB: Did you, do you know who Smith was out there? Is that a relative to Mrs. Voorhis?

HC: Mrs. Smith was Mrs. Voorhis' sister.

RB: Did she work out there? Or did she just—

HC: No, no. But she was often out there.

RB: And did they have a bell up in the top of the chapel at one time? In the bell [inaudible]?

HC: I think not.

RB: And was that road all the way, was that all paved by Mr. Voorhis on the way in?

HC: Yes, the road was paved by Mr. Voorhis

RB: Was the road there in the first place? Or did that build?

HC: The road was surveyed in and build at the time the original buildings were put in.

RB: I heard another story too that Dante infirmary, all the medical equipment was donated by the company to build the buildings. Is that true?

HC: I think in large part.

RB: Do you remember the company? What the company's name was?

HC: Oh, Foss, Foss Company of Pasadena.

RB: Foss Company of Company of Pasadena. And do you remember what the overall fuss with the—?

HC: No, I knew at the time. But I don't know now.

RB: Mr. Voorhis said it was about between one and a half, two million dollars. But then I've seen statistics in books that said three million. And you know it ranged back and forth.

HC: Well, I think his figure is what I understand to be the right one.

RB: Well thank you very much sir. I certainly appreciate your help.

End of interview.

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